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THE DELAWARE REGIMENT IN THE REVOLUTION.

NARRATIVE OF THE SERVICES OF THE DELAWARE REGIMENT WITH
CAPTAIN MCKENNAN DURING THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR.

BY MAJOR C. P. BENNETT,

LATE GOVERNOR OF DELAWARE, A LIEUTENANT UNDER CAPTAIN
MCKENNAN.

WILMINGTON, DEL., Jan. 1, 1843.

SIR,—During the last illness of my old friend, that tried patriot and honest man, the late Governor C. P. Bennett, the writing out the enclosed memoranda (for the purpose, as the address indicates, of forwarding them to you as the representative of Captain McKennan, whose Revolutionary services are therein commemorated) was almost his final occupation.

He died in the month of May, 1836, and, as I was at that time the Secretary of State, they were delivered to me by mistake among a mass of papers appertaining to the Executive office.

Having been mislaid, within a few days past I accidentally came across them, and not doubting that these records of a father's patriotism, in the handwriting of a veteran comrade after the lapse of more than half a century, would afford you high gratification, I send them to your address, and hope they may safely come to hand. The three sheets constitute the original rough draft of what would have been a clearer and more finished narrative had the old Governor been spared to revise and correct it.

It was written but a few weeks before his death, in the intervals of relief from the attacks of a most painful and violent disease, and of course bears upon its face the marks of haste in composition and some grammatical inaccuracies.

However, such as it is, you have it, and I have no doubt its perusal will interest your friends as much as it did

Yours respectfully,

WM. HEMPHILL JONES.

HON. T. M. T. McKENNAN,

Washington City.

HON. THOMAS M. T. McKENNAN:

DEAR SIR,—I have thought proper at this time, from memory, to furnish you with a narrative of the services of your father and my long lost friend, Captain William McKennan, during the war of the Revolution, being one of the last of that day that could be able to furnish you and your children with such detail; I flatter myself it will be as acceptable to the family as it affords me the pleasure to narrate.

To the best of my recollection, he entered the army of the Revolution in June or July, in the year 1776, as a second lieutenant in a company commanded by Captain Thomas Kean, in the Regiment of Flying Camp, commanded by Colonel Samuel Patterson, of New Castle County, State of Delaware. His services that season were performed in New Jersey, generally in the neighborhood of Amboy, under the command of General Hugh Mercer, of Virginia; at the close of that year he was appointed a lieutenant in the Delaware Regiment, and returned to the State on the recruiting service early in the spring of 1777. He joined the army at Princetown, New Jersey, and was in active service the whole campaign, say, in an excursion on Staten Island under General Sullivan, which proved disastrous to the Maryland Division, the Delaware included. On September 11th he was engaged in the battle of Brandywine; 4th October in the battle of Germantown, where he received a wound in his arm, which, I presume, affected him more or less during his life. After a very interesting and active campaign, the Maryland Division, with the Delaware Regiment attached, retired to winter quarters in Wilmington, under the command of General Smallwood. In May, 1778, we left Wil-

mington, and the division, by general orders from headquarters at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, proceeded to join the main army at that place without delay, as it was presumed the British army was making arrangements to leave Philadelphia and pass over the Delaware to New Jersey, and proceed for New York. A few days after our arrival at the Valley Forge the army took up their line of march for the Delaware. We crossed that river at Correll's Ferry, and continued our march to intercept the British army, which had left the city, and fell in with them in the neighborhood of Monmouth, where the battle was fought on the 28th of June. That day month we left Wilmington. After the battle was over, the dead buried, etc., the army proceeded to Brunswick and celebrated the Fourth of July, 1778; from thence to Kings' Ferry, on the North River, when we crossed that river and proceeded to the White Plains, State of New York, where we encamped and remained until September, when the army dispersed in different directions. We proceeded to West Point, to strengthen that position under the command of General Putnam, where we remained until we were ordered to proceed to winter quarters. The place designated for the army to halt was Bound Brook, New Jersey, where we remained during the winter. In May, 1779, when the army left they dispersed, some to the State of New York, others to Connecticut, but the greater proportion hovered in the neighborhood of West Point, on the North River; the Delaware Regiment remained in the western part of New Jersey. The army during the ensuing campaign remained inactive; nothing material occurred during this season other than marching and countermarching from place to place, particularly the Delaware Regiment, until we were ordered to take up our winter quarters at a farm near Morristown, New Jersey, where the army huddled.

The winter proved very severe, and the men suffered much from the want of provisions. Supplies could not be obtained from the distant magazines owing to the excessive falls of snow that prevented their transportation. We remained in our quarters until April, 1780. Nothing of

great importance occurred during our residence in winter quarters, except a detachment from the army made a descent on Staten Island, crossed the Sound on the ice, made every effort to attack a British post, but did not succeed as was calculated owing to the severity of the season. The detachment returned to their rendezvous, after suffering much from the inclement season. Early in April a general order issued from headquarters, for the Maryland Division (Delaware included) to take up the line of march under the command of General the Baron DeKalb, and proceed to join the Southern army under the command of General Lincoln, to aid him in his defense of Charleston. As it was understood there was a superior force of British troops, under the command of General Lord Cornwallis, pressing upon General Lincoln, the division proceeded on by forced marches, by land and water, until we arrived at Petersburg, Virginia. Soon after our arrival we received the intelligence of the fall of Charleston, which had surrendered, prisoners of war, to the British commander. This circumstance only increased our anxiety, and caused us to continue our pursuit to aid those troops that were out of the city on its fall and those on their route to join the American forces, and endeavor to cover their retreat should we arrive in time. By forced marches we arrived on Deep River, in North Carolina, where the Baron DeKalb was superseded in his command by Major-General Gates, who immediately on taking command, although the army at that time were not in a situation, from the extreme difficulty in obtaining supplies necessary for the present pursuit, ordered us to proceed on our route by forced marches, even in that situation, until our arrival at a striking distance of Camden, South Carolina, where the British army was concentrated. We encamped at Rugely's Mill, twelve miles from the British post. We remained in this situation but a day or two, to recruit and refresh the army after a long and fatiguing march, when orders were issued to parade at retreat beat, and wait for further orders. It was understood and believed General Gates meant that evening to move in a direction for Cam-

den, and attack the enemy by surprise in their quarters. Late in the evening our whole force moved in that direction from about equal distance from our position and that of Camden. The advance of the two armies met on the high road, exchanged firing, and both parties fell back on their main bodies. During the night General Gates selected his ground and formed the line of battle, and waited for the coming day to meet the enemy in battle array. During the night, it was presumed, the British, with the aid of the disaffected of that country, being perfectly acquainted with the ground, took advantage to reconnoitre our position and the situation of our forces. At early dawn the enemy made a furious attack on our weakest position, where the militia were posted, being on the left of the front line. After the first fire they gave way and left the field, although they were commanded by officers of the Virginia line, who made every exertion to rally them, but all in vain; they left the field helter-skelter. The attack of the left of the rear line was in the same style and eventuated in the same way. The Continental troops (Maryland and Delaware) were left to sustain the heat of the battle, when and where they acquitted themselves like soldiers devoted to their country. Eventually they were put to the rout, after sustaining serious losses both of officers and men, killed, wounded, and prisoners. Baron DeKalb, highly esteemed by the whole army, both from his gentlemanly deportment as well as the accomplished soldier, with many other valuable officers and men, shared the same fate.

Little Delaware felt that she had sustained her full proportion both in officers and men; two field and seven commissioned officers were taken prisoners, and the regiment was reduced to two companies by killed, wounded, and prisoners. Our whole remaining forces were put into a complete rout, and were pursued for fifty miles from the field of action, when the enemy drew off, after committing all the destruction on wagons, baggage, stores, artillery, and everything that fell in their possession. We continued the retreat to Hillsborough, North Carolina, two hundred miles

from the battle-ground. On our route we collected together the scattered remains of our defeated army. Hillsborough was our first resting-place. By the time we arrived there we found ourselves in a most deplorable situation, without arms, ammunition, baggage, and little sustenance, and for some time our situation was unenviable. After organizing our little army under the command of General Smallwood, and supplies for the troops of provision, clothing, arms, and munition, General Morgan was appointed to the command of a detachment of the *élite* of the remains of what was once an army, to proceed South and encourage the despairing Whigs, as well as collect together all that would join his standard, and eventually fell in with Colonel Tarleton and his desperadoes, and defeated them at the Cowpens, and took several hundred prisoners. Captain Kirkwood, of Delaware, and his company, attached to General Morgan's command, shared the glory and honor of that victory, which was one of the first fruits of the success which beamed on the Southern country. After Morgan's detachment left Hillsborough, the supernumerary officers without command, after the remains of the army was organized, returned to the different States; Captain McKennan, with several others, with myself included, to Delaware on the recruiting service. On our arrival, in December, 1780, arrangements were made for that purpose, but for want of funds, or from some other cause, the recruiting service did not go into effect, and the plan of substitutes was adopted, and in April, 1781, Captains McKennan, Queenault, Lieutenant Hyatt, and myself were ordered to Christiana Bridge, in New Castle County, to receive and drill such substitutes as might be brought forward. We remained at our post performing the duties required until the French Army from Rhode Island, and other detachments of the army, with the commander-in-chief at their head, arrived at our rendezvous in the month of August, when we received orders from General Washington to prepare to follow on to Virginia. In a few days we took up our line of march for Baltimore; we remained in that city for some days, when small craft was prepared for our

reception to proceed to Annapolis, where the French transports were waiting for the French army to embark. On our arrival at Annapolis we embarked, also, on board the "Marquis Lafayette." When the troops were all on board, the fleet of transports, with two frigates, weighed anchor, and proceeded, with a fair wind, down the Chesapeake Bay till we arrived at Linhaven Bay, where the French fleet were moored. We passed the mouth of York River, where lay two or three French frigates blockading the entrance. We lay that night at anchor with the fleet. Early next morning the transports proceeded up James River (all this time with a fair wind) until we arrived in the neighborhood of Williamsburg, Virginia, where we landed and joined the troops that had assembled there. As soon as the troops had all concentrated, with General Washington at their head, we left Williamsburg, and proceeded on our route for Yorktown, where the British troops had fortified themselves under the command of Lord Cornwallis. The whole army arrived in the evening, and took possession of the ground around the town after driving in their outpost, which we effected without much loss or inconvenience on our part; accomplished the end we had in view, that was, to form our camp so as to encircle their whole outworks. We experienced little or no inconvenience from the enemy in accomplishing the end contemplated in eight or nine days after our taking possession of the ground, and were soon occupied by breaking ground and raising our first parallel line, and soon had our batteries opened and in operation on the enemy. We continued plying our shells and shot for a few days, and made considerable impression on their works. The firing was kept up night and day until arrangement was made to storm two redoubts on the left of the town and near the banks of York River. When the hour approached to make the attack, which was some time after nightfall, the two detachments moved rapidly on to the charge without flints in their muskets to prevent any firing. The Americans were commanded by Marquis Lafayette, the French by Count De Lauzun. In course of a very short

period of time, and a rapid movement at the point of the bayonet, both redoubts were in possession of the different detachments, apparently at the same instant, without a shot being fired by either. The British kept up an incessant fire from every part of their lines that could be brought to bear on the assailants. The business was accomplished with little loss on either side, with few prisoners taken, as the enemy made their retreat as soon as the assailants entered their works, and every arrangement being made for the purpose previous to the attack, provided success should attend them, to inclose the two redoubts in our second parallel line, which was accomplished before the light of the ensuing day. The ground the redoubts occupied within our inclosure being elevated ground, gave us the complete mastery over the whole town as well as their outworks.

After completing the second parallel and opening our batteries, wherein no time was lost, we were enabled to direct our shells and to effect. The enemy made the attempt, soon after our taking the last position, to make their escape from Yorktown by crossing the river to Gloucester, which was a fortified post; and, after crossing a considerable portion of their force, owing to the inclemency of the night could not accomplish their intentions, had, of course, in the morning to recross and take their former position. By this time we were fully prepared and in possession of the heights around the town, on both flanks strongly intrenched. After destroying the ships that were moored on their right to secure the approaches on that quarter, we considered the siege near brought to a close, and in the course of a day or two proved the fact by a full surrender of the fortress with its contents. After the preliminary articles were signed, their forces marched out of the town, in the presence and full view of both armies, French and Americans, and thousands of spectators, to an open field within a short distance of the fortress, where the British army, English, Scotch, and Hessians, grounded their arms, and in the same order of march returned to their previous station, where they remained until the necessary arrangements could be made

for their future destination, which, perhaps, took up ten days or two weeks. When they took up the lines of march for the places designated for their reception after their movement, and everything arranged for the dispersion of the American and French forces, each division proceeded to its destination. The Pennsylvanians, Marylanders, and Delawares, under the command of General St. Clair, proceeded South to join the army in South Carolina under General Greene, where we arrived, after a long and fatiguing march, the 1st of January, 1782. On our arrival we (Delaware Detachment, commanded by Captain William McKennan), of course, took our station in William Washington's Legion, composed of the remains of his regiment of horse and the shattered remains of the Delaware Regiment, under the command of Captain Robert Kirkwood, with Captain Peter Jaquett, Lieutenants James Campbell and Thomas Anderson, who had been in the command of two companies of said regiment, and remained with the Southern army since the battle of Camden, on the 16th of August, 1780. When the officers above mentioned and the invalids, with several other non-commissioned officers and soldiers belonging to Delaware, were relieved by those under the command of Captain William McKennan, with Captain Paul Queenault, Lieutenants Hyatt and Bennett, they proceeded soon after on their route for the State of Delaware. Soon after the forces were concentrated under General Greene the army proceeded down towards Charleston, where the British were in force (the *élite* of the army was composed of the two legions, Washington's and Lee's, with a detachment from the line of the army, under the command of Major James Hamilton, of Pennsylvania), and took up a position in the neighborhood of Dorchester, on the Ashley River, and was constantly kept on the alert, never stationary, the whole or part of the command being continually on the lines watching the movements of the enemy. Colonel John Lawrence, of South Carolina, one of the aides-de-camp of General Washington, after the siege of York solicited and obtained from the commander-in-chief permission to return to his native State, where he

contemplated the most active services would be required, and the last effort would be made by the enemy previous to a general peace. At that time it was fully contemplated by the army that the war was drawing to a close, which proved to be the case. Colonel Lawrence was appointed by General Greene to take the command of the Light Troops on his arrival at headquarters from the siege of Yorktown. They were the *élite* of the army under his command, and keeping in advance of the main body, within striking distance of the enemy (Charleston being their headquarters), were kept on the alert for the remainder of the campaign, which continued open until the sickly season approached, when the main army retired from active duty.

The Light Troops were still in the field marching and countermarching, seldom if ever remaining two nights on the same ground, making frequent excursions on the British lines, often falling in with the enemy, when skirmishing would frequently ensue, and attended with considerable disaster on either side. At one time an attempt was made to attack a force of the enemy on John's Island by crossing the Stono River, but were foiled in the attempt owing to the flood-tide making the river unfordable earlier than was contemplated. Part of the troops did cross, but were forced to return, and abandoned for the present the contemplated attack. At another time, from Dorchester, we made an excursion of some considerable distance to attack if possible a large foraging party of British from Charleston in the neighborhood of Georgetown. The troops left the position in the evening, took up their line of march on the Ashley River and proceeded to Strawberry Ferry, on the Cooper, and by a forced march arrived at Hadrall's Point. The enemy had received intelligence of our pursuit and had abandoned their object just in time to prevent a rencounter, and we arrived just in time to see the rear of the troops embark for Charleston. At that time the Light Troops of the army, both horse and infantry, were at least one hundred miles by the route we had to return to headquarters, and then and there received orders from our chief to return to

the Ashley River with all possible speed by forced marches to our late position, which we accomplished with the least possible delay. General Greene, being apprehensive of an attack from the British at Charleston in the absence of the whole *élite* of the army, caused this rapid and fatiguing march. The distance to and from our late position we performed, by computation, a march of two hundred miles on that excursion alone. We still remained in active position, but our routes were not far extended until the latter end of August, as my recollection serves me. Then the army received intelligence that a considerable force of the enemy, as a foraging party, had left Charleston, and had proceeded South to Comhahee River. Of course, as soon as intelligence was received and confirmed, a heavy detachment was ordered from the army, as well as the Light Troops, under the command of General Gist, of Maryland, to proceed by forced marches to attack and break up the party. Colonel Lawrence, being on the alert, proceeded immediately on the route with a small force (Captain McKennan with the two companies of Delawares and a portion of cavalry), and pushed on in advance of the main body. Colonel Lawrence at their head, anxious to attack the enemy previous to the main body coming up, being in his native State, and at the head of troops, although few in numbers, were as he supposed sufficient to enable him to gain a laurel for his brow previous to a cessation of arms, and of course brought on the attack, could not wait until the main body of the detachment would arrive, but wanted to do all himself, and have all the honor. Fate had directed otherwise. Poor fellow, he was killed on the first fire from the enemy. In the fall and death of Colonel John Lawrence, the army lost one of its brightest ornaments, his country one of its most devoted patriots, his native State one of its most amiable and honored sons, and the Delaware detachment a father, brother, and friend. The troops, both British and American, for the remainder of the campaign were inactive; the heat of the weather and sickly season had arrived. The army retired from active service; remained in that situation until it was

understood the British army was on the eve of evacuating Charleston, the only position then held in the Southern States. Soon after Captain William McKennan and his command was ordered to proceed to the State of Delaware, there to wait for further orders. Of course we proceeded on our march for our destination. We arrived at New Castle, Delaware, about the first of January, 1783, where we rendezvoused until October of the same year, when the Delaware troops, as well as the army of the Revolution, was disbanded, after a seven years' war, with joy and rejoicing. Captain William McKennan was the officer appointed to settle and adjust the accounts of the regiment with William Winder, of Maryland, auditor or agent of the United States. When this was effected, Captain McKennan issued both certificates for services as well as land-warrants to the individuals, claiming, or their attorneys for them, and that to general satisfaction.

The foregoing is a correct statement of the facts as above stated from memory, after a lapse of fifty years and upwards, by me who acted my part through the whole scene.